

AN ESTIMATE OF THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER AND
STATE OF GREAT BRITAIN,

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED ON FRIDAY, APRIL 19th, 1793,

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL FAST;
AT THE
LOCK CHAPEL,
AND
ST. MILDRED'S CHURCH, BREAD-STREET;

By **THOMAS SCOTT,**
CHAPLAIN of the LOCK HOSPITAL, and Afternoon LECTURER
at the said CHURCH.

Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?
2 Chron. c. xxviii, v. 10.

L O N D O N:

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N. B. The Sermon, of which the substance is here published, was not delivered exactly alike in the two places where it was preached; and some further immaterial variations have been made, in preparing it for the press: especially some observations are added concerning prayer and fasting, from a Sermon preached the Lord's Day before, by way of preparation for the duties of the appointed season.



S E R M O N, &c.

ISAIAH. CH. V, VER. IV.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE MORE TO MY VINEYARD, THAT I HAVE NOT DONE IN IT? WHEREFORE WHEN I LOOKED, THAT IT SHOULD BRING FORTH GRAPES, BROUGHT IT FORTH WILD GRAPES?

I TRUST, we do not forget, that humiliation before God for our sins, as individuals, and as a nation, constitutes the great business of this day. We should have no reason to doubt of the divine assistance in endeavouring to preserve our civil and religious privileges against the assaults of any provoked enemies; did not our manifold offences against God render us deserving of his righteous indignation. Instead, therefore, of engrossing your attention by discussing party questions, which often cause men to "fast for strife and debate," I would endeavour to assist your meditation upon such subjects, as connect with the great design of our assembling together at this time.

The old Testament is peculiarly useful, in teaching us the rules, by which the Lord dealeth with Nations,

Nations, according to their conduct. Individuals will exist in another world, and "after death is "the judgment:" so that no exact retribution is awarded to them in this life, for "the wicked are "reserved to the day of judgment to be punished:" but collective Bodies will have no future subsistence, as such; and, therefore, their recompence is here appointed them. To ascertain the method of divine providence, in this respect, we must mark the difference between the nations, which are favoured with the light of revelation and the ordinances of God and those that are destitute of these and other peculiar advantages: and we must also recollect, that when nations, highly privileged in every respect, are otherwise ripe for judgments, their state is often prolonged for the sake of the pious remnant that is found among them. Where much is given, much will be required; and the same degree of impiety and vice, when found in nations peculiarly favoured with the means of instruction, has vastly more criminality in it, and fills up the measure of iniquity much more rapidly, than when found in places destitute of such advantages. Yet at the same time, the state of such nations may be prolonged; because there is amongst them a number of persons, whose prayers, examples and endeavours counteract the general tendency to total depravation.

In the passage of Scripture, whence our text is selected, the Lord, by his prophet, in a most beautiful parable manifests the peculiar care that
had

had been shewn towards Israel, especially in respect of their religious advantages : “ He had given to
 “ them his statutes and ordinances ; he had not
 “ dealt so with any nation ; neither had the hea-
 “ then the knowledge of his laws.” And, as the
 advantage of a parable principally consists in shew-
 ing to men, as in a mirror, the real state of the
 case, divested of their own concern in it, that
 they may be compelled to decide against themselves,
 by their judgment in respect of the parabolical
 description : so the Lord appealed to “ the inhabi-
 “ tants of Jerusalem, and the men of Judah, to
 “ decide betwixt him and his Vineyard, and to
 “ determine, whether any thing could have been
 “ done to make it fruitful, which he had not done in
 “ it ?” Why then did it only bear wild or poison-
 ous grapes, when good grapes might have been
 expected from it ? A similar appeal will at length
 be made to every man ; and though now self love
 warps the judgment, yet the Lord will at last
 condemn none, who will not be constrained to
 condemn themselves, and to justify him in their
 condemnation.

The nation, under the similitude of a Vineyard,
 being thus brought in guilty ; the Lord next pro-
 ceeded to denounce sentence against it ; declaring,
 that he would “ take away the hedge thereof, and
 “ it should be eaten up ; and break down the wall
 “ thereof, and it should be trodden down ; that
 “ he would lay it waste, that it should not be
 “ pruned or digged, but that there should come

“up briers and thorns; and that he would also
 “command the clouds, that they should rain no
 “rain upon it.” The sentence, here pronounced,
 was not executed till about 200 years afterwards:
 for Hezekiah, and Josiah, with Isaiah and other
 prophets, and a remnant of pious persons, by their
 labours and prayers prevailed for “the lengthening
 “of their tranquillity:” but at length the believ-
 ing remnant ceased, and then the sentence came
 upon the nation, by the Babylonish captivity. Yet
 it was more awfully accomplished, after the coming
 of Christ, and his crucifixion at the instance of the
 Jewish rulers, priests and people, with the subse-
 quent persecution of christianity: for then the na-
 tion was cast out of the visible church, Jerusalem
 was given up into the hands of the Romans, and
 hath ever since been trodden under foot of the gen-
 tiles; the Jews have been scattered into all na-
 tions, and the Lord hath indeed “commanded
 “the clouds to rain no rain upon them,” to this
 day. Thus they are left to be reluctant preachers
 to the nations professing Christianity; of the truth
 of their holy Religion, and the dreadful conse-
 quences of neglecting it.

Israel indeed was dealt with according to a pecu-
 liar covenant: yet their case did not very mate-
 rially differ from that of any nation, that is fa-
 voured with the clear light of the gospel: and if
 it should be enquired what nation is the Israel of the
 new dispensation? I could not hesitate in answer-
 ing Britain, both in respect of advantages, and a
 rebellious ungrateful abuse of them. This may
 suffice to introduce our subject, and to warrant an
 entire

entire application of the passage before us to our own case, as we are this day called to examine into it.

Let us then prosecute the enquiry, by considering,

I. The peculiar favours, with which a kind providence has distinguished our native land.

II. The improvement which we ought to have made of them.

III. The wild grapes, which the Lord finds in this his Vineyard.

IV. The consequence, that may be expected unless something effectual be done to prevent it.

V. To what we may attribute our preservation hitherto. And,

VI. What the duties are, to which we are now called, according to our different Stations in the church and the community. Nothing more than a very compendious View of these several important Subjects can be comprised within the limits assigned to this discourse.

I. We consider the peculiar favours, by which a kind providence hath distinguished our native land.

We have long been exempted from the calamities of war, that tremendous scourge of a righteous

teous God, by which he punishes guilty nations. Few of us know any thing more of war, than we have learned from the public papers or the page of history. We feel it indeed, when it takes place ; but how ? Trade suffers a temporary check, and additional taxes are demanded of us ; a number of not very useful members of the community are furnished with a perilous or fatal employment, and a few more valuable persons are exposed to the same dangers with them. But we have scarce any other idea of war, as it respects ourselves : and this has often a very bad effect upon the minds of men ; for they consider war no otherwise, than as it affects their property, and are, therefore, prone to engage in it too lightly, when it yields a prospect of temporal advantage, without duly reflecting on its consequences on the lives and souls of men, or on those regions that are exposed to its tremendous ravages.

Our situation happily renders us incapable even of conceiving—in imagination, those scenes, which are really exhibited on the theatre of war continually : the devastations of the open country, with all its productions ; rendering abortive the labours, and disappointing the expectation of the husbandman, and spoiling the bounty of a kind providence : the burning of cities ; the cries of widows and orphans ; the reeking blood, and mangled bodies of the slaughtered ; the groans, and ghastly appearance of the wounded and dying ; the penury, and pining want of the survivors ; the terrors of the night, and the horrors of the day, must baffle all description ; let who will be the aggressor

gressor or the victor in the War. So that the humane mind must be disposed to weep over, not only the most splendid, but even the most needful victories : and war, in every case, must be deemed the triumph or the harvest of the first great murderer, the devil. What then must be our obligations to the Lord of Hosts, who hath preserved us hitherto from the experience of such miseries ; and hath granted our native country an exemption from this dire judgment for a longer course of years, than hath almost ever been experienced by any other Nation ?

We have also been equally preserved from the fore judgments of famine, pestilence, earthquakes, and desolating hurricanes : plenty, health, and a serene and temperate climate have been vouchsafed us : a land abounding with all the blessings, that we can desire, and exempted from most of the calamities, to which other lands are exposed, hath fallen to our lot : and let us not so regard second causes, as to forget the first great Cause of all, who
 “ doeth what he will in the armies of heaven,
 “ and among the inhabitants of the earth.”

We might here enlarge on the blessings of our well poised constitution, and equal laws ; by which the personal liberty and property of every individual are secured, if not to the greatest degree which is possible in the present state of human nature. yet at least, beyond what hath hitherto been reduced to practice, for any length of time in any nation of the earth. Much hath been said of Grecian and Roman liberty : but it is well known that a very large proportion of the people, in those
 admired

admired nations, were slaves, the property of their masters: and equal freedom was not possessed among them in any measure comparable to what it is in Britain. Imperfection must be found in every thing, in which man is concerned; and it is desirable to redress every grievance, so soon as it is noticed: but we may surely be allowed to value, and be thankful for, our present advantages; till we are shewn more conclusively, than by well-penned pamphlets and ingenious speculations, that something much better is practicable among men. But 'tis enough to express thus briefly my sentiments concerning our constitution, and to testify, that I deem it one of the special favours of a kind providence to our native land.

But these are comparatively inferior considerations: our religious advantages are principally to be valued. When the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil; this land was enveloped in the grossest idolatry, barbarity, and ignorance: yet it was not long before the Sun of Righteousness, which arose at so great a distance, visited it with his sacred beams of life and salvation. After a time the superstitions, corruptions, and usurpations of the Romish church, like a dark cloud obscured this heavenly light: but the first dawning of the blessed reformation extended its influence into this Island, and our progenitors were numbered among those favoured nations, which were first emancipated from that slavery, and delivered from that gross darkness, that had long oppressed the western world. Others, after an ineffectual struggle, and much bloodshed, were again
reduced

reduced to bondage, under the persecuting tyranny of the Pontiff and his associates: this land, in the reign of bloody Mary was in peculiar danger of falling again under the same yoke; but God preserved his light among us by removing her, and advancing Elizabeth to the throne: and after defeating the subtle and powerful machinations of our enemies, in a variety of instances: He at length, by the happy Revolution at the close of the last century, established among us a degree of civil and religious liberty, which hath rendered us the admiration or envy of all our neighbours.

Whilst therefore, the nations, to which the Gospel was first vouchsafed, are reduced to a condition of the most deplorable ignorance; this distant region is enlightened in every part of it with the beams of heavenly truth. An excellent translation of the sacred Scriptures into our own language is put into our hands, and we are allowed, invited, and encouraged to read it. Copies of the Bible are so common and cheap, that almost every person may afford to purchase one; and if any cannot, or will not spare a trifle for this purpose, blessed be God, there are persons disposed to give it to them: nay, if any know not how to read the Word of life; there are those, who are ready to pay for their instruction, provided they are but willing to learn. So that none can plead that they are wholly destitute of the means of being made wise unto eternal Salvation. At the dawning of the reformation, our ancestors were thankful for a few leaves of the holy Scriptures in an imperfect english translation, and read them with the greatest avidity.

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When Bibles were first placed in the churches, the people throng'd to hear them read, with an eagerness, of which we have little conception: and in some parts of Wales at present, Bibles in that language are so scarce, that frequently several families jointly possess one, and have it a week at a time in rotation. This should teach us to value and improve our privileges, that scarcity may not make the word of God precious to us. A great variety also of other pious books are circulated at very low prices, and even *gratis*, which are suited to excite men's attention to the Bible, and to assist them in understanding it; whilst they are taught and encouraged to compare them all with that sacred standard, that they may learn to distinguish between the precious, and the vile. At the same time, no restraint is imposed on the preachers of God's Word; nor are any forbidden to attend on their instructions; and numbers, in almost all parts of the land are employed in publishing the glad tidings of Salvation, with a clearness and plainness, that hath seldom been exceeded. So that, we are peculiarly favoured with every advantage for becoming wise, holy, and happy: this hath been our felicity for a long course of years; and, when we consider how scarce in comparison copies of the Scripture were in Israel, and how much darker their dispensation was, than that of the Gospel; we shall be constrained to allow, (notwithstanding the prophets who were raised up among them,) that they did not possess religious privileges equal to those of our favoured land: so that the Lord may well demand of us, as a nation, what could have been done more for us, that hath not been done, as a proper means of rendering us a religious

religious and a righteous Nation? This leads us to enquire

II. What improvement we ought to have made of these advantages?

The Lord looks for grapes from this well cultured vine; he requires righteousness and judgment from a people so highly favoured. (v. 8.) To speak after the manner of men, it might have been expected, that all orders amongst us from the highest to the lowest, would, in their public and private conduct, have manifested a serious regard to the truths, precepts, ordinances, providence and glory of God. Sobriety, temperance, chastity, justice, truth, peace, and love should have been observable in our national character, and in all our transactions. They that come amongst us, and they among whom we go, should have been constrained to confess, that probity, sincerity, humanity, piety, meekness and purity abounded amongst us more than other nations, in proportion to our superior advantages. Impiety and immorality should at least have been discountenanced, driven into corners, put to shame, or dragged out to condign punishment, if it could not have been totally suppressed: and it should have been shewn, by all our laws, legislators, magistrates, and public measures at home and abroad, as well as in the conduct of the inferior orders, and of those employed in the sacred ministry, that we were a nation fearing God and working righteousness, a wise and understanding people, whom the Lord had chosen

to himself, for his own inheritance. Who can deny, that this ought to have been our national character? Who can excuse what is contrary to this, without palliating ingratitude, as well as impiety and iniquity? or who can account for it, without allowing that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked? For, alas! the case of numbers gives us occasion to enquire with Solomon, "wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it." (Prov. xvii. v. 16.)

We proceed, therefore,

III. To consider the wild, or poisonous grapes, which the Lord finds in his vineyard, instead of the good fruits for which he looked.

I do not intend, at present to descant on such vices, as are common to men, at all times, and in all places; but rather to select some instances, which may be deemed peculiar to this age and nation: remembering, that the Lord requires his servants, on these occasions, "to cry aloud, and not spare, to lift up their voice like a trumpet, whilst they shew his professing people their sins and transgressions;" as we found it written in that chapter, which with peculiar propriety was appointed for the first lesson, in our morning service. And I would remind you, that what may be spoken of national sins, should be applied by each of us to our own particular transgressions; as guilty individuals belonging to a guilty community. All our violations of the divine law, and
all

all our neglect, contempt, or abuse of the gospel, from our infancy to the present day, constitute a part of that accumulated guilt, for which the Lord hath a controversy with our land: and it is incumbent upon us, as we proceed, to enquire concerning every particular charge, whether we have not formerly committed, or countenanced the specified iniquity? whether we have used all our influence to prevent others from committing it? And what our conduct in these respects is at this present time? Thus we shall avoid the absurd hypocrisy of pretending to humble ourselves before God, whilst we are merely reflecting on the sins of other men, without confessing, mourning over, or forsaking our own.

I. The daring infidelity, and damnable heresies, which prevail amongst us, may well be adduced as one of our national sins. I say *damnable heresies*; for this is the language of scripture, and much mischief has been done by calling enormous evils by soft names; which seduces men into a forgetfulness of their malignity. I would not, however, be understood to mean every deviation from the system of divine truth. Much hay, straw, stubble, may be built on the precious foundation, which God hath laid in Zion; and though the builder will suffer loss, yet he may be saved, as by fire: so that all mistakes are not *damnable heresies*; and it would be arrogance in any of us to suppose, that our creed is wholly free from such worthless mixtures. "But other foundation can no man lay, than that, which is laid, even Christ Jesus." The truths respecting his person, as God manifested
" in

"in the flesh," his sacrifice, and mediation, and the sanctifying work of his spirit, are inseparable from christianity, and stand, or fall with the authority of the scripture, and our reverence for it. I must, therefore, be allowed confidently, to maintain that the apostles, if living, would pronounce many modern dogmas to be damnable heresies, subversive of the foundation : more plausible indeed, but no better, than infidelity ; to which by an easy transition they evidently tend.

We seem, almost universally, to stand as it were, aghast, at the atheism and daring impiety of that nation, with which we are at war : and indeed we cannot too much execrate their principles and practices ; which seem to constitute a new exhibition of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart : but if we infer, that France is, as a nation, more criminal in the sight of God, than Britain ; we may perhaps be found partial in our judgment. We are not competent to decide on such a complicated question, which involves in it all our advantages, and their disadvantages : nor can the decision be at all necessary for our hope of deliverance, or conducive to our humiliation. In one respect we act more wisely than our opponents ; for they insult the God of heaven, set him at defiance, and, as it were, declare war against him, as well as against mankind ; whereas, we make our appeal to him, and call publicly on him for assistance, whilst we confess ourselves deserving of his righteous indignation.

On the other hand, it must be allowed, that the atheism and impiety of France want many of those aggravations, which are found in our infidelity, and rejection of revealed faith. Few among them were previously acquainted with the holy Scriptures, having been discouraged from reading and examining them. The religion, which they had witnessed, was in general a compound of gross absurdities, unmeaning forms, human inventions, and priestly usurpations or impositions; which only needed to be exposed, to become the objects of contempt and abhorrence. Voltaire, and other ingenious fascinating infidels, were the apostles of their reformation; the ideas of civil liberty and of religion entered into their minds at the same time, and thus were associated together: there was no one at hand to set before them true christianity, in its genuine beauty and simplicity, when they turned from their old superstition with disgust; and no wonder they greedily imbibed the sentiments of those, who had emancipated them from their former abject slavery, and that they even carried their principles further than their teachers had done.

But the partial, or total infidelity, which rapidly spreads amongst us, is of another kind. Men, who have been instructed from their youth, in the principles of christianity, and who want neither talents, opportunity, liberty, or encouragement for free enquiry, have deliberately and decidedly given the oracles of reason a preference to the oracles of God! The deists, who some time back, opposed the divine authority of the scripture, have been completely baffled in the open field of argument; and no man now ventures forth, as an adversary on that ground,

ground, which has been found absolutely untenable. Yet their successors, though they know this, persist in their opposition to revelation, either altogether, or by rejecting as much as is incompatible with their several systems. They start objections, and hold forth scriptural doctrines, or facts to derision, by a distorted partial statement: they cavil at them, with a supercilious sneer: they affect the reputation of superior discernment, by treating their forefathers as bigots and fanatics, and by holding in sovereign contempt those of their cotemporaries, whom they dare not face in the open field of calm dispassionate argument: thus they address the self-sufficiency, and love of the world, which predominate in inexperienced young persons: they circulate their objections in periodical publications, mix them up with criticism, history, and other works of genius and erudition; and gild over the mental poison, thus administered in small doses, with every thing that can render it pleasing and unsuspected: they retail, by all possible methods, those objections against the scripture history, and the principal doctrines of revelation, which have been repeatedly and solidly answered, insinuating more than they chuse to *avow*; and they are almost as zealous in disseminating their antichristian principles, as the primitive preachers were in spreading the gospel of God our Saviour.

Thus it hath come to pass, that in a land, full of bibles, and means of understanding them; and greatly favoured with faithful preachers; that an increasing multitude affect to speak of revelation with doubt or suspicion, if not with avowed contempt

tempt and aversion: numbers aspire to the reputation of wit and penetration, by ridiculing or railing at the contents of the scripture: and others study the art of explaining away whatever they dislike. So that the pride of human wisdom and human virtue, (connected with "the carnal mind which is "enmity against God,") hath almost prevailed to explode the Bible as an antiquated book; or at least to bring it into neglect, as not entitled to much credit, and as having no authority over the consciences and conduct of mankind: whilst the prevailing maxim is, *that it is no matter what men believe, if they behave properly to their fellow creatures*: This has been our unhappy progress, during the last century; though christianity has at the same time been set before us, peculiarly unincumbered with superstition, or intolerance, (and not remarkably deformed by enthusiasm,) in its genuine simplicity and amiableness, as suited to render mankind wise, holy, and happy. Such is the stamp of modern infidelity in Britain; and we have reason to fear, that it will still diffuse its baleful influence more widely among our posterity. As a nation, this seems likely to be our condemnation, "that light is come among us; and we have "loved darkness rather than light, because *our "deeds are evil.*" (John, c. iii. v. 19—21.) The contempt, with which God's word is treated, in a nation, which hath been so long and so greatly favoured with it, is an awful sign of the times, and cannot but be exceedingly provoking to him; and it must tend, in a rapid manner, to fill up the measure of our national iniquity.

2. Connected with this, we may notice the general neglect of God's ordinances, and the profanation of his holy day, which distinguish the age in which we live.

Not long since it was customary to insert in advertisements of stage coaches and waggons "*Sundays excepted*": but this decent regard to that day, which the Lord Jesus claims as his own, (Rev. c. 1. v. 10,) is now thought superfluous; and *Sundays not excepted*, either in setting out, or proceeding on, the journey, is avowedly a part of the present plan: whilst multiplied Sunday newspapers, publicly sold in the streets, furnish employment for those who amuse themselves at home, and supersede the duties of the cloister, the family, or the house of God. No wonder that legislators and magistrates *care for none of these things*; when the Lord's day is generally selected by *them*, and all those in the higher ranks of society, (nay, by many who bear a sacred character,) as the most convenient day for travelling! whilst not a few of them call together their acquaintance, for every kind of dissipation, or even for gaming on this day of sacred rest! Thus multitudes are permitted without molestation, to carry on their business; and still greater numbers of the lower orders flock to scenes of riot or diversion, corrupting each others morals, and wasting that which should maintain their families. The tradesman, (and even the statesman,) makes the Lord's day his season of relaxation and indulgence; taverns, alehouses, tea gardens are thronged, and no means used to prevent it: the places of worship are deserted; and even the form of religion is growing

growing into disuse, throughout the land, but especially in the metropolis and its vicinity.

At the same time, many who seem to be religious, meet their friends at the place of worship, and go home to feast with them: their converse may be about religion, and they may outwardly attend to some of its duties: but their servants have a double portion of work, to provide for the entertainment: it is to them a day of bustle and fatigues; and they have no time allowed them for the love of their souls, or the duties of religion.

All these things combined together may well be considered as a plain testimony, how much we have sinned against the light, and how greatly we dishonour the reasonable service of our God: for, if men, instead of observing the rules contained in the lesson, (Isaiah, c. lviii. v. 13, 14.) will serve the world, the flesh, and the devil on the Lord's day; they cannot be expected to serve any other master, during the rest of the week.

3. It is obvious, in the next place to mention that profanation of the holy name of God, which marks the character of our age. I do not mean that profane swearing, and taking of God's name in vain, which mingles with the common conversation of vast multitudes: this is indeed an atrocious affront to the Majesty of heaven; but it is not peculiar to any age or nation, though more heinous in this favoured land than elsewhere. I advert, however, to the horrid crime of direct perjury;

which perhaps never was so frequent in any age of the world, as it is at present. The extreme impolicy of multiplying oaths on every occasion, that pervades and disgraces the whole of our jurisprudence; and the shameful irreverence, with which they are generally administered, concur in deducting from the solemnity of the transaction; and men are induced to consider an oath at a matter of course; rather than an express appeal to the heart searching God, to attest the truth and sincerity of what is alleged. Thus, not only men of scandalous lives are involved in the guilt of perjury, but multitudes who are in other respects of good repute: so that it may be apprehended, oaths are often taken by parish officers, by jurymen, by electors, nay, by those who are elected to serve in parliament, and by many other descriptions of men, without any due consideration of their import, or any proper sense of their obligation! And who can compute how many thousands of times, in the course of a single week, the God of heaven is called to witness the truth of what is not known to be strictly true; and the sincerity of men in those engagements, which they never intend literally and exactly to comply with? It is a form, with which they comply as others do; and when the engagement is violated, the numbers concerned keep one another in countenance. Thus, "because of swearing the land mourneth;" and the perjuries, and profanations of the name of the Lord, which abound in every place, loudly call for divine vengeance upon us; especially as no care is taken to bring the offenders to justice, or to remove the occasions of such atrocious impiety.

4. We must not here pass by that trifling with solemn subscriptions and engagements, which often connects with men's admission into holy orders or ecclesiastical preferments. To subscribe articles which men do not believe in the obvious sense of the words, and which they mean to oppose; to avow themselves "moved by the holy Ghost to take on them" the sacred ministry, when secular motives alone induce them to chuse that line of life; to ratify this equivocating profession by receiving the Lord's supper; to read a liturgy, and in their sermons and conversation to contradict what they have uttered on their knees before God; and then to palliate and vindicate such a system of prevarication and hypocrisy: this, I say, must constitute a degree of guilt of no common atrocity. And I deem myself the more bound to speak on this subject, because I only describe my own conduct in times past; and I verily believe, that in this respect I added more to the aggregate of our national guilt, than in any other action of my life; though in manifold instances I see abundant cause on this occasion, to abase myself in the sight of God, as one of that guilty land, which this day deprecates his righteous indignation, with prayer and fasting.*

But indeed, many other things, which continually are practised, and connived at, in men's entrance into

* It may be needful to mention, that I have since been led most cordially to embrace the doctrines, I then rejected; or else I should have deemed it my duty to quit the situation, which I had surreptitiously obtained in the Church of England.

into holy orders, and in their obtaining and holding livings and preferments, are utterly incompatible with either piety, truth, or righteousness. Yea in these respects, "prophaneness goes forth from the priests to all the inhabitants of the land:" and whilst infidels adduce such facts among their best arguments against religion, we cannot wonder that profligate men will prostitute the ordinance of the Lord's supper as a step to preferment; or that such a scandal to our church establishment is allowed to subsist among us. These things are ripening us apace for judgments, and filling up the measure of our iniquity.

5. Covetousness, fraud, lying, and oppression of the poor, have hitherto been so general in all ages and nations, and have so connected with the commercial dealings of ungodly men; that it might appear an empty declamation, should I insist upon them, on this occasion. One particular, however, must not be omitted; I mean the execrable and execrated slave trade. Whilst the extreme iniquity and cruelty of this commerce, and its fatal effects on three quarters of the globe at least, but especially throughout the vast continent of Africa, were little known or regarded; it might be considered as the guilt of individuals, and not a national iniquity: but now, that the monster has been dragged forth to public view, and all the world hath been shewn, beyond possibility of palliation, the multiplied murders, cruelties, and enormities that are inseparable from it's existence; to set it up, as another Moloch, to be immolated by myriads of human sacrifices every year, merely on a false or dubious persuasion of national emolument,

is such a renunciation of all justice, truth, humanity and mercy, for the sake of filthy lucre, as can hardly be equalled in the annals of mankind. What then must be its criminality in this favoured region of light and liberty? "Blood defileth the land, in which it is shed; neither can it be cleansed from it, save by the blood of him that shed it." (Num. c. xxxv. v. 33 :) and the case cannot be altered by the mere circumstance of the blood being shed at a distance, by the inhabitants of this nation. So that the unavenged blood of thousands of poor negroes cries daily from the earth unto the Lord, against the inhabitants of Great Britain; and will continue to do so, more and more, until this atrocious evil be completely terminated; and murder, rapine, and cruelty be no more sanctioned by our legislature: or until the Lord take the matter into his own hands; and we learn to our cost, that honesty and mercy are the best policy; and that oppression of the poor and helpless can never enrich, but will certainly sink every nation that sanctions them.

In vain do we fast and pray, unless we "loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free." (Isaiah, c. lviii. 5. 6 :) for whilst lucrative sins are persisted in, our repentance can only resemble that of Pharaoh, who cried out, "I have sinned," but would not consent to liberate the oppressed Israelites. Without attention to such plain duties; how can we call this a fast, or an acceptable day to the Lord?

After they frequent expensive public diversions (which are multiplied beyond the example of former times)

After such an overgrown evil, and bloodshed on so large a scale, it may almost seem an approach to trifling, when I proceed to mention the blood shed in duels, and not avenged by the death of the murderer. Whilst so many thieves are put to death, by a policy not authorized in the word of God, and evidently not attended with his blessing : almost the worst of murderers are suffered to escape ! But let magistrates, and jurymen look to it, how they will answer it to God ; if under the term of manslaughter, they liberate the malicious murderer, and so abet duelling ; which is one of the greatest outrages against both the law and gospel of God, which can almost be conceived.

6. Among other national sins, it will perhaps excite surprise, that I mention the luxury and extravagance of the age. I mean not, however, to inveigh against all those excesses, which, though indeed very criminal, are not peculiar to the present times. I advert to the prevailing disposition of all orders in the society to emulate their superiors, till all distinction of rank is nearly lost. By a variety of methods, which are useful to a certain degree in a commercial country, credit may be acquired to a very large extent : men, therefore, possessed of small property, engage in business disproportionately large ; and then launch out in their expenditure, according to their *apparent*, not their *real* circumstances. They vie with each other, and with persons of real affluence, in their houses, furniture, appearance, attendants, and entertainments : they frequent expensive public diversions, (which are multiplied beyond the example of former times,)

times,) and they join in every fashionable vanity : till at length their accumulated debts weigh them down, and multitudes are ruined along with them. This is come to such a pitch, that it threatens the destruction of credit itself, and commerce with it; and the effect may possibly prove the punishment of our other sins.

The case is similar with the inferior orders : servants emulate their masters : their wages are lavished away in needless expences ; so that old age or sickness finds them destitute, or their death leaves families unprovided for. The evils, which originate from this source, can scarce be enumerated : it concurs with other things to produce that spirit of gaming, which ruins numbers, and often terminates in suicide : and it is a principal cause of those varied methods of fraud and robbery, which fill our jails with wretched inhabitants, and make way for so many lamentable executions : whilst the other national sins, that we are about to consider, greatly originate from this prolific source of vice and misery.

7. Of these we may next mention the venality, which so greatly degrades our national character; and threatens even the subversion of our excellent constitution. Whilst men in general live above what they can afford, they will certainly be tempted to grasp at gain from every quarter; and in general, a sufficient compensation will determine them to any measures or any party. Thus things are now come to that pass, that few of those, who elect members to serve in parliament,

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honestly

honestly vote for the wisest and most upright men that are proposed to them, without expecting any other compensation than their faithful endeavours to serve their country; but by far the greatest number, in other places, besides the small boroughs, expect to be paid, in some way or other, for their votes: and so great is the selfish ingenuity, that is exercised in evading the laws, that no method hath yet been found effectual for preventing such bribery. How then can it be expected that the senate should be very uncorrupt? For, whilst the people, like Esau, sell their birth-right for a morsel of meat, or other paltry considerations; *they* have scarce a right to complain, if they find others as venal as themselves: and surely *they* at least must expect, that those persons, who have purchased the distinction of legislators at an almost insupportable expence, will endeavour to indemnify themselves, by the use they make of their talents, votes, and influence. This evil spreads so wide, and pervades all orders of men to that degree, that we may enquire with the prophet, "Who is there among you, that would shut the doors for nought?" (Mal. c. i. v. 10.) And it is a sad proof of the debility, which hath seized upon our moral and religious constitution; for "the whole heart is sick, and the whole heart is faint," through this inveterate disease, which is the genuine offspring of luxury and extravagance, connected with avarice; an insatiable rapacity in getting, and a profuse prodigality in spending.

7. The daring licentiousness, that prevails among us, is another most deplorable evil. The unexampled effrontery, with which the trade of prostitution is conducted; the multitudes, who yearly in the prime of life fall sacrifices to it; the wide spreading effects of it on domestic life; the exceeding frequency of adultery; the encouragement given to ingenious women of profligate character, to publish their infamous memoirs; with many other particulars that might be adduced, evince that the licentiousness of the present age differs from that, which must be expected in the general course of human affairs. There will indeed be abandoned men and women, so long as ungodliness prevails: but surely they might be driven out of our streets, into their dark recesses, in some degree at least; and salutary regulations might prevent the morbid part of the community from diffusing the fatal contagion so rapidly as is done at present! It is indeed said, by way of objection, that worse and more fatal effects would probably ensue, from such an interposition: but I apprehend the reason to be insufficient, and that it is incumbent on legislators and magistrates to adopt some method of discountenancing such destructive practices; and to leave the event to God. However, the very objection shews the awful state to which we are reduced, and what cause we have to fear, lest we should speedily become like Sodom and Gomorrah; only much more inexcusable, because of our superior advantages.

I shall conclude this part of our enquiry (not because the subject is exhausted, but because want of time requires it,) by mentioning,

8. Lastly. The said abuse, that is made of the gospel by those, who profess to believe it.

If the name of a christian hath been rendered odious to Pagans and Mahometans, throughout the earth, by the crimes of men who bore, and disgraced, that appellation: the peculiar doctrines of the gospel also, have been grievously exposed to contempt and obloquy, in our land, by the atrocious misconduct of many, who have zealously contended for them. “Woe be to the world because of offences!” indeed we have all need of humiliation before God this day, because we have failed of recommending the doctrine of God our Saviour to others, by our example, as we ought to have done; and, because in some respects, we have increased their prejudices by our misconduct. But I more especially advert to the notorious dishonesty, and other scandalous crimes, which have been discovered in the habitual conduct of zealous disputers for evangelical tenets; the total disregard for relative duties, which many hath manifested; the loose antinomian tenets, by which this laxity of practice has been varnished over; and the bitter, boasting, censorious, and backbiting spirit, with which religious controversies have been conducted: These, and various other, abuses of the gospel, have furnished infidels with their most formidable weapons against the truth; have given countenance to those, who substitute a decent proud morality, in the place of repentance, faith, and holiness; and have quieted the minds of careless persons with the idea, that religion would rather make them worse than better; and led them to conclude, that there is no reality in it, seeing they can detect so much
hypocrisy,

hypocrisy, in mens profession of, and zeal for, the gospel.

And now, if we take these things together, comparing them with our national advantages and obligations, will it not be evident, that “when the Lord looked for grapes, he hath found wild grapes?”

We proceed, therefore, to enquire,

IV. What consequences may be expected, notwithstanding the Lord’s long suffering, unless proper means be used to prevent them?

The context expressly answers this question; the Lord himself declares what he will do to his vineyard, “I will,” says he, “take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain upon it.” If we provoke the Lord by our ingratitude, to withdraw from us his providential protection; our fleets, our armies, and all the advantages of our situation, will do nothing to prevent our falling under a foreign yoke, or having our land desolated by hostile invasions. We may also be left to learn from experience the sore judgments of famine, pestilence, and other desolating scourges. But it will suffice, if the Lord in anger should leave us to ourselves, and to our mad passions, or infatuated counsels. We should

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in that case soon throw away our mercies with our own hands; every man's sword would be turned against his brother; we should speedily be plunged into the horrors of civil war, and witness such massacres and desolations, as we can scarce bear to read of, in the accounts we receive from a neighbouring nation. The invasion of Judea by the Chaldeans, the siege, taking, plundering, and destroying of Jerusalem, with the subsequent Babylonish captivity: and the final ruin of that devoted city by the Romans, whilst 1100,000 persons miserably perished during the siege; together with the calamities which followed the remnant of the Jews, in their dispersion through the nations, and their condition to this day, constitute a solemn warning to us, above all people on the face of the whole earth.

But we have most reason to fear, lest we should be deprived of the gospel, which we have so much despised or abused; lest "the kingdom of God" should be taken from us, and given to a nation, "bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matt. c. xxi. v. 43.) In this respect our sin may very probably become our punishment: the wide diffusion of infidel and heretical principles, (of which politics are at present a very convenient vehicle,) may at length be permitted totally to eclipse the light of the gospel, and leave us to sink into heathen impiety and irreligion. This is the more to be dreaded; because these principles get ground so rapidly, in those families, congregations, and seminaries, where the doctrines of the gospel have long been supported. The rising generation, is, in many places, apparently disposed to change the religion
of

of their fathers, for modern improvements of the faith ; and great pains are taking to train them up accomplished pastors, according to their own hearts. Thus we may reasonably fear, that the Lord's vineyard will be laid waste, and only bear thorns and briers ; and in that case, he will surely " command " the clouds to rain no rain upon it." (Hēb. c. vi. v. 7, 8.)

Such of us, as are past the meridian of life, may perhaps hope, that the light will not be removed in our days : but we may well tremble for our children ; lest they should be left, as a part of this guilty nation, to prefer man's devices to the sure testimony of God : and lest the candlestick should be removed from this land, after the example of the churches of Asia. (Rev. c. ii. iii.) This spiritual judgment is more to be feared, than war, famine or pestilence ; than subjection to a foreign conqueror, or a domestic tyrant ; nay, than the fury of an ungoverned multitude, the horrors of anarchy, and the cruelties of factions, contending with, and by turns prevailing against and wreaking their vengeance on each other. But if the Lord be provoked to withdraw his gospel, he will depart from us in other respects, and " woe be to us, if he depart from us."

It is vain to say, that ministers in former times have dolefully foreboded the same things ; and yet we are preserved, and prosper. " Because sentence " against an evil work is not executed *speedily* ; " therefore, the hearts of the sons of men are " wholly

“wholly set in them to do evil.” (Eccles. c. viii. v. 11.) Doubtless the unbelieving Israelites would urge the same objection against the messages of the prophets, when the threatened vengeance was mercifully delayed: no wonder then, if “in these last days there are scoffers, walking after their own lusts; and saying, where is the promise of his coming? (2 Pet. c. iii. v. 3, 4.) But though the Lord be long suffering and slow to anger, he will by means acquit the wicked:” and he will surprise them by his judgments, when they least expect them. If we decide about *the time*, when national punishment will be inflicted, we exceed our commission: but if we declare that “except we repent, we shall perish,” as Israel did, we only say what the Lord hath commanded us. Many a time did he deliver his ancient people, when they provoked him with his counsel, and were brought low by their iniquity; yet, at length “wrath came upon them to the uttermost;” and so it will upon us, if we copy their example, and do not use proper means of averting his indignation. And this leads me to enquire,

V. What withholds these judgments at present, and prolongs our national mercies?

I would not willingly aggravate, or palliate any thing in our national character; but would impartially and simply state the doctrine of God’s word on this important question, so far as I am capable of discovering it. We may, therefore, safely allow, that there is a bright, as well as a dark side, belonging

ing to our subject ; and it is far more agreeable to discuss this, than some of the preceding topics. Our measure of iniquity, alas, fills apace ; but it is not yet full : nay, many favourable circumstances may be descried, which give some ground for hope, that we may yet be preserved ; if by any means a proper attention to the important concern can be excited in the minds of the inhabitants of our favoured land.

1. Then, we observe with heart-felt satisfaction, that persecution of the church of Christ is no part of our national guilt : at least, should any defects in our laws be called by so harsh a name ; we may rejoice, that a blessed inexperience of greater severities occasions our noticing such trivial deviations from the system of complete toleration, which hath been introduced among us.

When God hath a number of spiritual worshippers in any country, and they are permitted to live unmolested, and to follow the dictates of their consciences in his service ; I apprehend, that something must still be wanting to render that nation ripe for vengeance ; and that the prayers offered by believers, for the peace of the land in which they enjoy peace, will continue to prevail : until they be removed from the evil to come ; or until a departure from tolerating principles drive them away, or bring them under the yoke of oppression. Herod, to his other crimes, added yet *this above all*, that he shut up John Baptist in prison, and put him to death. It was the principal charge brought against the nation of Israel, that they murdered the Lord's prophets, and persecuted his faithful servants ; and

the crucifixion of Christ, with the violent rage and cruel enmity of the Jews against his disciples, filled up the measure of their iniquity, when wrath came upon them to the uttermost: nay, the abominations of mystic Babylon would not have been complete, had she not been “drunken with the blood of the saints, and of the martyrs of Jesus.” We may, therefore, consider the tolerating spirit, that at present prevails in our land, as a very favourable circumstance, and an encouragement and obligation to pray for the continuance of its peace and prosperity.

2. We may remark, that christianity, as it hath of late years been displayed among us, has produced great effects in rectifying the judgments, and in some things meliorating the dispositions of vast multitudes, who are very far from being the genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus. Hence it arises, that humanity and philanthropy constitute a part of our national character, *as it is displayed at home*: would to God, it were equally manifest and undeniable in all our concerns with other nations, throughout the whole earth!

However, the benevolence and liberality, with which distress in every form obtains relief in Britain, should be noticed with due commendation, and cordial satisfaction: and this benign and friendly spirit hath lately been very honourably exercised, in the hospitable entertainment given to the poor destitute outcasts, who have sought an asylum in this country, and who by nation and religion might have been considered as inimical to us.

We are not indeed authorized to expect, that liberality, when unconnected with repentance, faith, love to Christ, and true holiness, will be a man's passport to heaven; for those acts of kindness, which the Judge will adduce at the great day, as the reason of his people's admission to their inheritance, are evidently such as spring from faith in him, working by love, and manifesting itself by kindness to his disciples for his sake. Nevertheless we may hope that the Lord will recompence the mercy shewn to the poor in this land, "by the lengthening of our tranquillity," (Dan. c. iv. v. 27:) for he commonly rewards external services with temporal benefits; even when he disapproves of the motives and principles, from which they result; (1 Kings, c. xxi. v. 29.)

3. The infidelity, impiety, perjuries, oppressions, and cruelties, before enumerated, have not been let pass, without a solemn and earnest protest being entered against them, both in the senate, and from the pulpit and the press: and this helps to retard our doom. Men have stood forth, like Phinehas, inspired with zeal for the honour of God, and the authority of his law, as well as influenced by the most enlarged philanthropy; and they have spared no pains, ventured all consequences, and persevered amidst reproaches and discouragements, in bearing testimony against inveterate evils, and labouring for their extirpation: and it seems to be the doctrine of scripture, that whilst a considerable remnant of princes, priests, or prophets, endeavour to stem the torrent of national iniquity, the measure of that people's sin is not full: at least, until it be finally decided, that their efforts have been in vain, and

done nothing but expose them to public scorn and hatred. This is at present a favourable symptom in our case: may the Lord increase the number of such witnesses for truth and righteousness, in every part of our land! and may he prosper all their endeavours to do good!

4. Notwithstanding the general prevalence of scepticism and infidelity; yet the number of those, who preach the "faith once delivered to the saints," is supposed by many competent judges to be upon the increase: now if this be indeed the case, and if they, of whom good hopes are formed, do not disappoint them, either through the fascinations of the world, the fear of man, or the spirit of error; we may even look for such a revival of pure religion, and, reformation of manners, as will not only lengthen our tranquillity, but avert the judgments that we fear.

5. There is no doubt a very considerable number of true christians, dispersed throughout the land: these "are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world;" they are habitually "sighing and mourning for the abominations that prevail;" and are now called forth, as an embodied militia, to unite in prayers, with humiliation and fasting, in behalf of our guilty land. Whatever hypocrisy or formality may, therefore, be found in the services of multitudes, on this occasion, or however still greater numbers may totally neglect it; (one of which must always be the case, where large bodies of men are concerned;) yet very blessed things may be expected in answer to the prayers, and in consequence of the services, of this day.

Moreover

Moreover these persons are employed, in their several places, to counteract the progress of infidelity, impiety, and vice, and to spread the gospel of Christ. They are indeed "our chariots and "horsemen," in whom our chief strength consists: and if ten righteous persons would have preserved Sodom and the neighbouring cities, had so many be found in them; and if Paul prevailed for all who sailed with him: we may yet hope, that the Lord will spare the land; in which so many thousands of true believers may doubtless be found, who are now uniting their earnest requests in its behalf. In the close of the deplorable American war, when our resources seemed almost exhausted, and four formidable powers combined against us; the Lord answered the prayers of his people, and we were both delivered, and restored to prosperity. When some years since, our justly beloved Monarch was afflicted in a very distressing manner, and every serious mind was ready to forebode some fatal consequences, from the divided state of the land: the Lord again heard prayer, graciously restored him, and dispelled our fears: and of late, when our ingratitude again provoked his indignation; there seemed to be just ground of apprehension, that the people, instigated by ignorant or crafty insinuations, would have madly thrown away their invaluable advantages, and plunged us into the most dreadful confusion; but the Lord hath again answered our supplications, and we are hitherto preserved. "O that men would, therefore, "praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the "wonders that he doeth for the children of men!"

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But we cannot tell how long the case may be thus with us : sin is the only enemy we need fear ; the impious principles of our adversaries are in reality more formidable, than either their arms or their politics ; and if, to the many evil lessons we have learned from them, we should copy their example of avowed, and general irreligion and infidelity, after having so long enjoyed the full advantage of divine revelation : then our measure of iniquity will be full ; the few remaining believers and witnesses for Christ will be either removed to heaven, or exposed to persecution ; the floodgates of divine judgments will be opened, and we shall be made a warning to other nations, not to abuse such privileges, or thus to weary out the patience of the Lord of Hosts : which leads me to enquire,

• VI. Lastly, What those duties are, to which we are called in the present circumstances, according to our different situations in the church, and the community ?

It is requisite in this way to bring the subject home to each of us : otherwise the enumeration of crimes committed by others, and even by some of our superiors, might prove a gratification to a censorious temper, and foster our pride instead of leading us to humiliation : but if we duly apply it to our own case, it will produce very different effects. For, when we recollect, that all who concur in, or neglect the proper means of preventing, atrocious crimes, in some degree participate the guilt ; we shall be convinced, that we all are criminal, as to some or many of those things, which have this day
been

been considered ; and that we owe a duty to our native land, to which we have not hitherto sufficiently attended.

1. It is incumbent on each of us, to examine every part of our conduct, in order to personal humiliation, repentance, and amendment. In this review, we should particularly reflect upon the whole of our past lives, and all our conduct towards God and our neighbours, according to the various relations that we have sustained, and the transactions in which we have been engaged. All our thoughts, words, and actions, as far as we can recollect them ; all our negligences, and omissions of duty ; our misimprovement of time and talents ; the bad effects of our example and converse ; and our most secret sins, (as well as the more open and gross,) should be adverted to ; and especially we ought to look carefully into every part of our behaviour, and the state of our souls, at the present time. Such a thorough scrutiny, attended by earnest prayer to the heart-searching God, to shew us what our character is in his sight ; and conducted according to the perfect rule of his holy word, will convince us, that no small share of the national guilt hath been contracted by us ; and that the whole charge of infidelity, irreligion and iniquity does not belong to others only, but in a measure to us also ; that we have helped to ripen the nation for divine judgments ; and that we have more cause, than the beloved prophet had, to confess *our own sins*, as well as the sins of our people, (Dan. c. ix. v. 26.)

This examination, and these discoveries should be connected with deep self-abasement in the sight of

of God; ingenuous confessions of all our sins, and the manifold aggravations of them; and acknowledgments that “we are unworthy of the least “of his mercies,” and deserving of his indignation: we should solemnly renew our acceptance of his salvation, and surrender of ourselves to his service, (if we have previously been acquainted with that important transaction, between a believing penitent and his merciful God and Saviour :) we should earnestly seek to him for grace, to enable us to amend our lives, and to attend to every part of our duty: and we should deprecate his wrath, and beseech him, that our native land may not be exposed to his judgments, through our transgressions.

Such seasons of deep humiliation, personal or public, have, in every age of the church, been accompanied with fasting; an abstinence from animal indulgence, or even from all food, when that will consist with health, and the performance of other duties: and our Lord hath given directions about fasting, as occasionally incumbent on his disciples. We thus emphatically confess, that we have forfeited all right to the gifts of providence; whilst “we chasten ourselves with fasting,” we express our humble submission to the justice of God in our condemnation, and our chearful acceptance of his correction; we mortify our animal nature, and teach our appetites to brook denial, even in things lawful, whenever inexpedient; and this favours abstraction from worldly concerns, and marks the season to be appropriated to such superior engagements, that attention to animal recreation should be suspended, as much as possible. The acceptance which nations, cities,

cities, and individuals, have ever met with, in thus turning to the Lord with weeping, fasting, and prayer, is a sufficient reason, that we should seek him in the same way ; and a confutation of those, who would represent fasting to be a pharisaical and needless observance.

2. We are called upon, to improve our talents, and use our influence, in stemming the torrent of infidelity, impiety, and vice ; and suppressing, if possible, those enormities, which are the scandal of our nation and holy religion, and in promoting the cause of truth and righteousness.

The ministers of Christ, as watchmen and stewards of the *mysteries of God*, have their peculiar line of service : and woe be to them, if they preach not *the gospel*, instantly and faithfully, not pleasing men, and not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God. The legislator and magistrate may bear their testimony, and exert their diligence, in another way, and in different places. They, who are entrusted with superior abilities and learning, should not “ bury their talent in the earth,” but occupy with it, as those who expect the coming of their Judge. The affluent may use their estates, and the influence derived from them, to good purpose ; if they consistently endeavour, by every means, to discountenance vice and irreligion, and to recommend piety and righteousness to all around them. The merchant may render commerce subservient to the noble design of propagating christianity, and disseminating the word of God in distant regions ; thus counteracting the effects of the crimes perpetrated by nominal Christians among Pagans and Mahometans. They,

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who have families, should, by their example, converse, and instructions, labour to imbue their minds with good principles, and to lead them to holy practice. Every man has his circle, in which he possesses some influence, which may either be abused to bad, or improved to good purpose. Few industrious persons are so poor, but they may spare a trifle from needless expence, to promote the gospel, the dispersion of pious books, and such other designs, as counteract the endeavours of those, who disseminate error and vice among mankind: nor will the poor widow's two mites be overlooked, when consecrated to such services.

Thus, every man, in his proper place and duty, (like officers and soldiers, constituting a well disciplined army,) may contribute to promote that reformation of manners and prevalence of religion, which alone can ensure the continuance of our national prosperity: and, though the attempts of each person, separately considered, may appear trivial; yet the united efforts of a large multitude, engaged in the same cause, as with one heart and soul, may, by the blessing of God, produce extensive and durable effects. But,

3. They, who can do little else, may be helpful by their prayers, for "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." All true believers are righteous before God; none of us think more humbly of ourselves, than they did, who prevailed so wonderfully in former ages; and omnipotence can effect its purposes by second causes, as well as by miracles: if then we pray according to the precepts, doctrines, promises, and examples of scripture, with a view to the glory

glory of God, in dependence on his power, truth, and mercy, with submission to his providence, and love to our fellow creatures, and with earnest importunity and perseverance; we may be confident that "by the Spirit we offer that effectual, fervent prayer which availeth much."

"Let me alone," (said the Lord to Moses, when he pleaded with him in behalf of rebellious Israel) "that I may destroy them in a moment:" he could not, so to speak, proceed to take vengeance, unless his servant would cease to plead for them. Abraham desisted from asking, before the Lord delayed to grant his supplications for guilty Sodom. Sennacherib's numerous host was too feeble to withstand the united prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah: nor could Herod's prison and guards detain, or destroy Peter; when time was given to the church to pour out their prayers for him. Do we then hear of good designs which seem likely to be frustrated, through the artifices of the enemy, and their interference with men's secular interests? Let us remember, that our prayers are appointed, and effectual means of removing these impediments: and perhaps the Lord delays the success of such designs, till he be importuned by the whole multitude of his people: that as he alone can send prosperity, or give the blessing; so the whole glory may thus be given to him, whatever instruments he may honour by employing in such beneficial services. It is, however, our bounden duty thus to assist all, who labour to do good. We should pray, without ceasing, that the ministers of Christ may be faithful, bold, zealous, prudent, and successful; that the Lord would send forth labourers into his vineyard; that

pure christianity may be diffused on every side ; that the church may become as “ a city that is at unity
 “ with itself ;” that at this time, “ when the ene-
 “ my comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord
 “ may lift up a standard against him ;” that irreligion and false religion may be suppressed ; that Jews, Pagans, Infidels, and Mahomerans may be converted ; that such as are gone, amidst manifold dangers and hardships, to preach the gospel, in remote regions, may be protected, supported, comforted and prospered ; and that “ the earth may speedily
 “ be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the
 “ waters cover the sea.”

We should pray, (not only in the service of the church, but in our closets and families ;) that the Lord would bless our king, and all his counsellors, ministers, senators, and magistrates, with wisdom and grace ; that the best methods may be taken, to preserve peace, and promote religion at home ; and to extend the same blessings to the nations abroad. We should intreat the Lord, who hath all hearts in his hands, to dispose the contending parties to peace, and thus prevent the further effusion of human blood ; to stem that torrent of iniquity and misery, which bears down all before it, in the once flourishing land of our enemies ; that so a way may be made for the establishment of peace, order and good government, at an equal distance from despotism and anarchy ; and that a tolerating system may open a door for the successful preaching of the gospel among them : and, in short, we should beseech him so to over-rule present calamities, that now “ his judgments are abroad in the lands, the inhabitants of
 “ them may learn righteousness.”

Charity,

Charity, in all its branches, constitutes an important part of our present duty, as it was emphatically inculcated in the lesson for the morning service. But whilst “ we give our bread to the hungry, and bring “ the poor outcasts to our houses ;” we should also remember “ to forgive our enemies, to bless them “ that curse us, to pray for them who despitefully “ use us ; and not to be overcome with evil, but to “ overcome evil with good.”

These are some of the principal duties incumbent on us : and in vain does any man pretend to be a patriot, who will not practise them : for by his sins he is helping to bring down divine judgments on the land ; and he refuses to concur in the proper means of averting them. The preparation for, and subsequent improvement of, such solemn observances, constitute a principal part of their benefit ; and, if due attention be paid to these obvious duties, by those in general, who apparently keep this day according to the design of it, we may expect important consequences.

I would conclude with observing, that, if there should be any present, who have not felt themselves interested in these things, and purpose not to give heed to them ; they may perhaps be preserved from national judgments, by the humble prayers of those whom they despise : but without personal repentance, faith, prayer, and newness of life, they cannot be saved from the wrath to come. On the other hand the upright believer need not be dismayed, on account of those iniquities, over which he sighs and mourns : for he will be taken care of at all events ; should the deluge come in his days, he will be found in the ark, and nothing shall separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And

And now, O Father of Mercies, we beseech thee to give thy blessing to the word of all thy ministers, this day; that there may be joy in heaven over many sinners brought to repentance; and that thy people may be stirred up to greater diligence in every good work, and more fervent zeal for the glory of thy name. Hear the supplications, which, with many thousands of our fellow christians, we have presented before thee, in behalf of that much favoured, but guilty land, of which we confess ourselves to be guilty inhabitants. O that we may indeed shew, by works meet for repentance, that our humiliation this day hath been unfeigned! Avert the judgments which we have deserved; revive thy work in our land, make true religion to prevail over all opposition, and prosper those who labour to do good to men for thy sake! Have mercy upon our fellow creatures, in other nations, and bid the avenging sword of bloody war return into its scabbard. Pity our infatuated enemies; bring them to repentance, and incline them also to turn to thee, with weeping, fasting, and prayer; that so, their miseries may be terminated; the wicked devices of such as persist in mischief, be finally disappointed; and the blessings, with which thou hast long favoured us, be extended to them, and to all other nations; till genuine liberty and peace as the effects of pure christianity, may fill the earth, and bless the whole world of mankind! These prayers we present before thee, in sole dependence on the merits and mediation of thy Son Jesus Christ. Now to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three Persons in one mysterious Deity, be ascribed all glory, praise, and adoration, for evermore. Amen.

F I N I S.

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